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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the displaced homemaker, defines her plight, and delineates the successful Displaced Homemaker Program conducted by the Fort Wayne area (CETA) consortium. The emphases of the program focus on the fundamental concerns of the displaced homemaker, i.e., the establishment of a new identity, the resolution of financial problems, and the setting of future goals. The components of this six-week program are outlined in detail, and include: (1) the initial period of informal interactions to establish a sense of group cohesion and support; (2) activities of the next five weeks which concentrate on self-image, community resources, individual need fulfillment through community resources, survival, and job attainment; and (3) other program services such as field trips to resource agencies and supportive service providers, psychological and vocational testing, medical and dental services, transportation, and child care. A letter from a participant is included as a subjective evaluation of the program. Recommendations from the program evaluation are elaborated. (NRB)

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Helping the Displaced Homemaker: One Day at a Time

by

Karen Parker

CG 015030

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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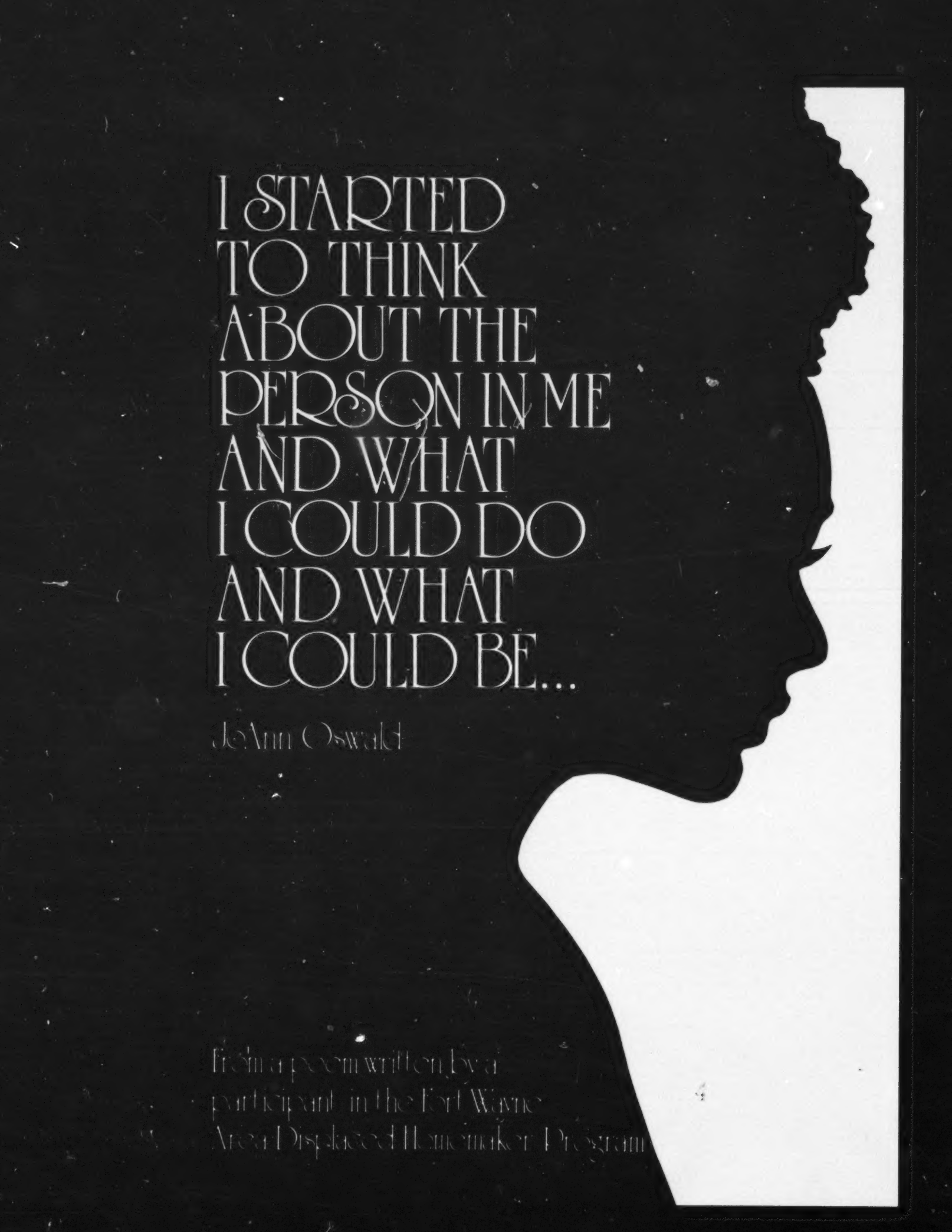
I STARTED
TO THINK
ABOUT THE
PERSON IN ME
AND WHAT
I COULD DO
AND WHAT
I COULD BE...
JoAnn Oswald
from a poem written by a
participant in the Fort Wayne
Area Displaced Homemaker Program

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As Coordinator of the Private Industrial Council of Northeast Indiana for the Fort Wayne Area (CETA) Consortium, Karen Parker is responsible for all private sector activities and also participates in the Indiana State Association. Ms. Parker's involvement with displaced homemakers began when she was employed as a counselor with the Fort Wayne Displaced Homemaker Pilot Program funded by federal discretionary funds in 1977. In 1978 she became Director, with responsibility for every aspect of displaced homemaker programming including client counseling, contract negotiation, and legislative advocacy.

Ms. Parker is a member of the National Displaced Homemaker Network and has worked with the Department of Labor Women's Bureau. She has been a frequent speaker about displaced homemaker programs for numerous organizations throughout Indiana. As State Secretary for the Indiana Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, she helped draft its legislative platform which includes strong support for the issues that affect displaced homemakers in Indiana. She is a member of the Fort Wayne Women's Bureau and the Fort Wayne Area Advisory Council for Employment of the Handicapped, and serves on the Board of Directors for several community organizations, including the American Red Cross.

Karen and her husband Raymond own a farm in Northeast Indiana and are the parents of two daughters.

FOREWORD

The intent of the following paper is to present the Displaced Homemaker Program conducted by the Fort Wayne Area (CETA) Consortium. Having served as the Program Director, I will always hold my experience in that program very dear. Many of the participants remain my good friends.

The program was reviewed and evaluated as successful primarily because of the harmonious union of administrators, staff, and participants. The thoughts contained in these pages are real, just as are the great ladies who participated in the Fort Wayne Displaced Homemaker Program.

Karen Parker

HELPING THE DISPLACED HOMEMAKER: ONE DAY AT A TIME

Karen Parker

The displaced homemaker is a new phenomenon in our society. This paper identifies the displaced homemaker, defines her plight, and describes a successful displaced homemaker program conducted by the Fort Wayne, Indiana Area Consortium (CETA) with the author as program director. Emphasis is on the fundamental concerns of the displaced homemaker: the establishment of a new identity; the resolution of financial problems, including her search for a satisfying and fulfilling job; and the setting of goals for the future. A letter from a participant in the Fort Wayne program testifies eloquently to the positive effects such programs can have on individual women.

"I never dreamed I could feel so alive and physically good and have so much faith in the future. . ."

Participant in the Fort Wayne
Displaced Homemakers Program

Introduction

In 1977 the Fort Wayne, Indiana Area Consortium of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) learned that discretionary funding would soon be available from the Department of Labor to launch demonstration projects across the nation for displaced homemakers. The decision of the Fort Wayne Consortium to apply for this funding was almost nonchalant--little did the planning staff realize that by doing so they would alter the lives of hundreds of women and bring a national movement to the northern Indiana area.

The original grant was for program operation during FY 1977. However, the demonstrated effectiveness of the program allowed for the grant to be continued through May of 1979. Unfortunately the program was discontinued after this time because of lack of funding. Today, however, limited program options are available to displaced homemakers within the Fort Wayne Area Consortium through CETA programs and the Fort Wayne Women's Bureau.

The displaced homemaker movement was begun in the mid 70's by two women from California who identified the crisis and coined the phrase. As of late 1979 the movement had mushroomed into approximately 300 programs nationwide, most of which were minimally funded. A national office now exists in Washington, D.C., where people can visit or write for resource information and service references. Clearly, the movement to ratify the

Equal Rights Amendment and the feminist movement have contributed greatly to growing public awareness of the phenomenon of the displaced homemaker.

Most service providers are aware that the original broad legislative intent was to provide services to women over forty years of age who had been out of the work force a minimum of ten years. However, after extensive negotiating by the National Displaced Homemakers Network, the Department of Labor Women's Bureau, and numerous participants in the nationwide displaced homemakers movement, the following "official" definition was drafted into the Federal Regulations for the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

A displaced homemaker is defined as an individual who:

1. Has not worked in the labor force for a substantial number of years, but has instead worked in the home providing unpaid services for family members.

2. Was once dependent on public assistance or on the income of another family member, but is no longer supported by that income.

3. Is receiving public assistance for dependent children at home, but will soon be losing such assistance.

4. Is unemployed or underemployed and experiencing difficulty in obtaining or upgrading employment.

Even this relatively broad definition excludes thousands of women who desperately need services but just miss being eligible for entry into Department of Labor-funded displaced homemaker programs. However, such women can often be placed with displaced homemaker programs which have other sources of funding.

Although Indiana has not been known as an aggressor in women's

rights or thought attractive as a location for demonstration programs, United States Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana authored the original legislation for support and funding of displaced homemaker programs. The Department of Labor Women's Bureau has also been a crusader on the displaced homemaker issue, and locally, the Fort Wayne Women's Bureau is attempting at this time to confront some grass roots issues and renew substantive services for displaced homemakers.

The Displaced Homemaker--Who is She?

Displaced homemakers do not comprehend initially the true nature of their dilemma. In most cases the displaced homemaker finds herself having difficulty determining the difference between goals, memories, and emotions. This self-imposed state of "ignorant bliss" is one of many methods the displaced homemaker may use in the beginning to deny the actual circumstances of her life. But as she tries to carry on a life alone, society eventually forces her to confront herself and her problems.

The learning process begins when she is suddenly left alone and her family automatically expects her to become the breadwinner--the head of the household. At first she responds to the unspoken demand for stability during this time of emotional havoc by adopting a facade of strength and stoicism. Unfortunately, she has probably never perceived herself in this role before, and is not likely to feel either competent or qualified to fulfill such major responsibilities. Sometimes the displaced homemaker flees her home in the face of all these pressures, leaving family and possessions behind. Whether her choice is to stay or leave, the displaced homemaker is

on the defensive. She must cope with the rigors of basic survival, provide for herself, most often provide for her family, and get on with the business of deciding what she will do with the rest of her life. These are no small tasks under the best of circumstances. Goal setting may appear to be an easy task, but for an individual whose entire life is in disarray, even setting the goal of picking up an employment application is a major activity. The displaced homemaker, at this point, is usually struggling to make it out of bed each morning, and often feels incapable of more formidable efforts.

A displaced homemaker experiences four sensations as she comes to terms with the facts of her new life: pain, numbness, fear, and finally, anger. The first feeling is one of agonizing pain--she believes that her life and future have been destroyed. Numbness sets in next, followed closely by fear. She is afraid of the new role that has been thrust upon her and, most of all, she is afraid of herself, having minimal faith in her capacity to cope with her problems. Often, she believes death would have been kinder than the circumstances that have forced her to be so vulnerable and frightened. Some clients become overwhelmed at this stage and remain permanently within a restricted world supported by various social service programs. Once anger surfaces, their situation becomes more hopeful, although their anger is often interchangeable with bitterness and hostility. Eventually, despite ever-present frustrations, the angry displaced homemaker emerges from her ordeal stronger and ready to take responsibility for her life.

In Search of a New Identity

Taking responsibility for her life also means that the displaced homemaker must face realities. Reality number one for the displaced homemaker is that she has lost her previous identity. Her new world of co-workers, students, divorcees, or widows may not be willing to accept her--she may now be perceived as a competitor and an automatic threat. Even her close friends may view her differently in her new role. She may be surrounded by people who are going through hard times themselves and, as a result, are withdrawing from casual relationships. Understandably, she may be hesitant to plunge into new friendships as she strives for progress. She is truly on her own--a person who is no longer part of a couple, an outcast from her former world. People are wondering how she will handle her new situation. At a time when she needs self-confidence the most, her basic abilities are in question. Eventually she learns to tolerate all of this awful, painful reality--after all, it won't go away. Now she is ready to set some priorities, and maybe even accept some help.

Accepting assistance is a new ordeal. Sometimes well-intentioned help can be detrimental, especially if the displaced homemaker has not advanced to this stage in the evolution of becoming a whole person again. Asking for help entails admitting to the existence of problems and inadequacies within the self. When a displaced homemaker finally asks for help, she is often at the bleakest point of her existence, recognizing that she is unable to cope anymore by herself. In most cases, treatment is necessary for the entire family of the displaced homemaker. They too have been "displaced," and their lives are in complete disarray.

Once she has sought help, the next step in her search for a new identity is coming to terms with a predictably poor self-image. Most displaced homemakers are reluctant to give themselves credit for possessing any capabilities. When you have done nothing but keep house and take care of children for a number of years, you soon grow to believe that you are incapable of supporting yourself in the work world. Many of the participants in the Fort Wayne program had been told since birth that they were not intelligent--when you are reminded repeatedly of such a thing, you eventually believe it.

-If you are never apprised of your financial status, nor allowed to write a check, how can you learn how to manage a budget?

-If you never see a paycheck or a financial report, how can you know how much has been spent on booze, gambling, and the "other" woman?

-If you are constantly intimidated and ridiculed, how can you possibly feel like an equal?

-If you have been used for sexual gratification only, how can you feel tenderness and love?

-If you have been mentally and physically abused, how can you remember that you are a person of worth?

Survival--The Basic Question

As needs and crisis tolerance levels vary, so do basic abilities for day-to-day survival. Especially in the beginning, a displaced homemaker often enters a controlled and sheltered environment because of the emotional devastation that has interrupted her daily functioning. In other cases, adequate support and aid are present and family and friends help in fulfilling her basic needs.

Willingness to utilize existing community services is crucial at this point. It has been proven historically that the needs of displaced homemakers can often be met by existing, available services. But the majority of such services or programs have not been marketed to any extent, and the general public is usually unaware of their existence. A few communities coordinate social services in one central location. Rural communities, however, usually offer limited services and rarely have a coordination point. In addition, most minority communities are reluctant to allow their people to seek help beyond the boundaries of their own neighborhoods. This is especially true of Amish and Hispanic communities who definitely prefer to "take care of their own."

Getting Through Life One Day at a Time

In her attempts to establish a new identity, often with the help of community-based programs like the one in Fort Wayne, the displaced homemaker is really just trying to live her life one day at a time. Each day can be glorious or hellish, and the displaced homemaker becomes a fragile and brittle being who requires large doses of kindness and empathy. The careful planning of her daily routine becomes a monumental task--when a person's very existence has been shattered, the most elementary tasks become overwhelming.

As she searches for support, the displaced homemaker begins to consider many sources. Often the support she has anticipated does not materialize, and she must search harder or wage her battle alone, a consequence that can cause long-term emotional scars.

Resolving Financial Problems

Practically all displaced homemakers have financial problems; those who are financially secure are rare and should consider themselves fortunate. Analyzing the sorry state of one's financial situation is a difficult task for almost everyone, but it can be a leveling blow to an already deflated individual.

Going from a comfortable salary level to the subsistence salary level of public assistance or alimony is mortifying. Once the displaced homemaker realistically confronts her financial plight, she is usually ready to call for help. She recognizes that she has reached the point where she must utilize all possible resources to their maximum potential if she is to avoid poverty. Often she must accept financial assistance, at least until she is on her feet and has found a job. This can be a bitter pill to swallow even as it forces her to mobilize her resources.

Finding Employment

Pages and pages can be written about the employment potential of displaced homemakers. Barriers to employment exist for almost every category of individual seeking work, but far more barriers exist for displaced homemakers. These women must familiarize themselves with the current labor market, statistically assess their capabilities, call forth all of their personal determination, acquire new skills, and break down enough of the barriers to obtain employment.

Their foremost problem is lack of recent experience in the labor market. Although many of the difficulties encountered in the search for employment can be systematically counteracted, nothing actually replaces previous experience.

Displaced homemakers are interested in a wide variety of jobs. After years of running a home, many prefer not to enter structured employment but choose to participate in some type of entrepreneurship which markets a skill they already possess. A large percentage of displaced homemakers enter training programs to upgrade or obtain skills. Others are successful in breaking into nontraditional kinds of employment where they can command significantly higher wages. Finances are always a primary motivation.

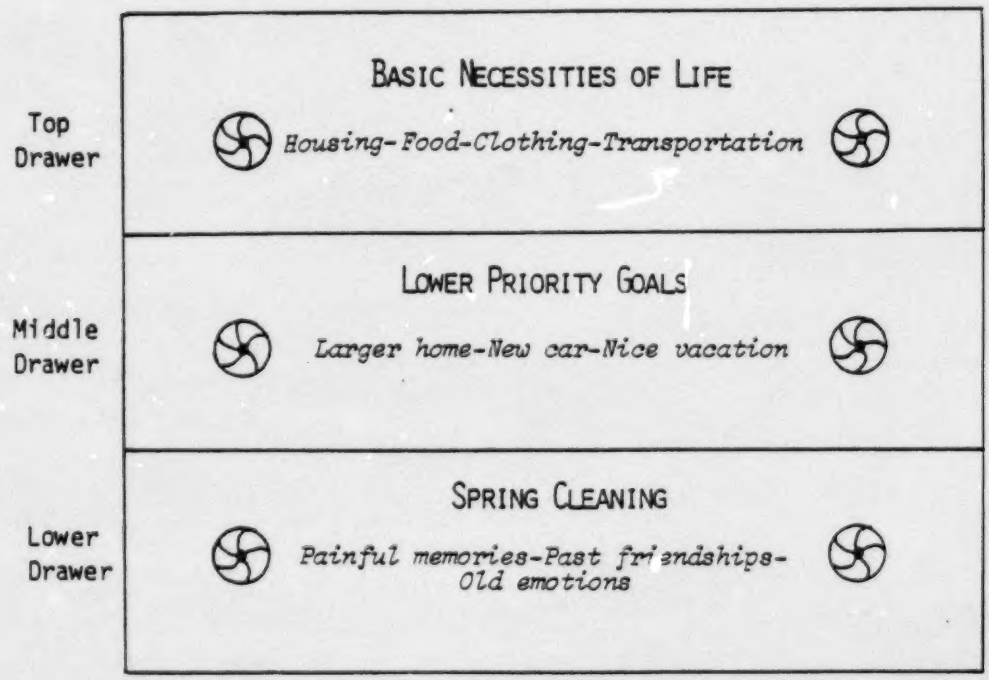
Many programs today attempt to help the displaced homemaker acquire effective employability skills, but obstacles remain and will not disappear until the private sector gains an awareness and understanding of the plight of the displaced homemaker.

Setting Goals

Realistic goal setting is crucial for the woman who believes she can do nothing, but knows that she must do something. Emotional goals are often misdirected. One client vowed she would never cry in front of her children, but found that her children thought she no longer cared about their future when she adopted a hard-surfaced attitude. Emotional stability is probably the most critical goal for the displaced homemaker--it is instrumental in determining her chances for a bright future. Many standard methods exist for initiating realistic goal setting, among which are personal contracts, progress charts, or possibly testing exercises. The Fort Wayne program developed a simple method called the "Chest of Drawers" theory of goal setting to get the displaced homemaker started.

Every displaced homemaker can identify with a chest of drawers. She has organized, cleaned, filled, and emptied similar drawers many times.

When setting goals the displaced homemaker is told to imagine her life as a series of drawers. The basic necessities of life (the top priority) are in the top drawer: shelter, food, clothing, and transportation. The middle drawer holds goals such as a larger home, a new car, and a nice vacation. The bottom drawer is not really filled with goals, but rather things that are often confused with goals--painful memories, past friendships, old emotions, and other problems which exist but cannot be controlled.



The Chest of Drawers Theory of Goal Setting

The displaced homemaker is told to equate the bottom drawer with spring cleaning. From time to time it may be necessary to pull these things out, dust them off, and reflect upon them. But after a time they must be put back

into the drawer, neatly arranged in their proper perspective, so that one can get on with the business of trying to achieve the goals in the top two drawers.

Another method of teaching individuals to set goals is to prepare a chart much like a road map. On the map the person lists every possible obstacle between the starting point and the final goal. This procedure helps to insure careful planning, and also allows individuals to deal with barriers before they seem insurmountable.

Both of these goal setting methods work well for the displaced homemaker because she can identify with them. Telling her to "prioritize her goals and objectives" is too cognitive an approach and requires more of her than she can usually manage.

The Fort Wayne Program

The Fort Wayne Consortium Displaced Homemaker Program responded to the following important facts collected by the International Women's Year Commission and the U.S. Bureau of the Census:

1. Not all widows are financially protected by social security at the death of their husbands. To be eligible for this assistance, a widow must be 60 years of age.
2. 86% of divorced women are not awarded alimony; of the 14% who are awarded alimony, only half collect it regularly.
3. Only 44% of divorced mothers are awarded child support; less than half of this number collect it regularly.
4. In 1975 35% of all female heads of households were widows.
5. Over the past decade, the number of single-parent families headed by women has grown ten times as fast as two-parent families.
6. In 1975 there were approximately 10 million widows and almost 4 million divorced women in the United States. This represents a 45% increase in widows, and a 223% increase in the number of divorced women since 1950.

Displaced homemakers who participated in the Fort Wayne Program completed six weeks of orientation, the final outcome of which was to find employment. During the first week clients interacted informally with the staff and each other, received detailed information about the intent and objectives of the program, and were apprised of available services. The week ended with a "rap" session that helped group members establish a sense of cohesion, with strong feelings of support for one another. The following outline presents detailed information about what happened during the remaining five weeks, although it does not include the various field trips to resource agencies and supportive service providers that were a part of every six-week session.

FORT WAYNE DISPLACED HOMEMAKER'S PROGRAM

I. Self-Image

A. Creating a positive self-image
B. Establishing personal goals
C. Human relations
D. Resources for job interest and personal goals
E. Importance of communication--workshop on self-worth

II. Community Resources

A. Community resources
B. Personal appearance--details of dress
C. Continuation of discussion of community resources
D. Translating dreams into future plans
E. Discussion of vocational options

III. Meeting Our Needs in the Community

A. Visiting a technical institute
B. Communication skills
C. Steps in applying for a job
D. Credit systems
E. Effective expression

IV. Survival in Today's World

A. Review of group and personal goals
B. Purchasing

C. Communication as a means of survival
D. Taxes--places to go for tax help
E. Banking

V. Job Attainment

A. Potential employment
B. Personnel interview
C. Review of vocational options
D. Problems encountered when looking for a job
E. Questions to be answered

The Fort Wayne Program also included batteries of psychological and vocational tests, basic medical and dental exams, eyeglasses, transportation, and child care. In some cases, supportive services went much further. The important point is that whatever type of need was identified, the program attempted to meet it.

When the women had completed the six-week program, they were often extremely "high" emotionally. This euphoria served as an excellent long-term foundation for future pursuits.

An enrollment analysis for 1978 is representative of other program periods.

Total enrollment	193
Entered unsubsidized employment	70
Transferred to other employment and training programs	103
Did not complete the program	20

Actual follow-up during the program was at first deemed to be adequate. Relationships with individuals were maintained and group activities planned and well-attended. Statistical data to support the continuation of the program, however, were difficult to gather, mainly because the progress of the Fort Wayne Displaced Homemakers could not be measured in numbers. The methods the staff used for measuring the success of the program meant very little

to those who were not directly involved in program operation. Thus, in retrospect, the program staff feel that evaluation and follow-up were less than adequate.

The following letter from a participant represents the kind of subjective evaluation which was so typical of those who went through the program. The eloquence of this letter speaks for itself and explains precisely what the Fort Wayne Displaced Homemakers Program was all about.

> I never dreamed I could feel so alive and physically good and have so much faith in the future. I would like to know that Displaced Homemakers would continue, not just for two more groups but on and on helping as many women as possible. This is what we need and what we've wanted.
>
> Before Displaced Homemakers, I existed like a talking zombie. I cleaned house, cooked, yelled at the kids, did my duty and waited until my youngest would be 18 and my job would be over. I really didn't care whether I lived or not. I was tired of everything, unhappy, bored, and drinking too often. I felt half the world was crooked and the other half too good to speak or be bothered with me. I even quit leaving the house to go shopping and only left in emergencies. I was mentally and physically a mess--a dedicated loser and a good one.
>
> I had heard of CETA but put off coming down as I felt anything that sounded good, well, there just had to be something wrong. The only thing wrong with the Fort Wayne Displaced Homemaker Program is: not enough people know the facts and understand the true function of it.
>
> The first day I came in I'll always remember. It was the first time in a long while that I had asked for help. I was afraid but knew somehow I had to do something about my life before it was too late. I was given an interview.
>
> Instead of the cutdown and refusal I expected, I received

a warm, friendly feeling, encouragement and a lot of hope. I couldn't believe it. Instead of being lied to, made to feel like a beggar and brushed off, I felt like something good was going to happen to me. It did. I was accepted for the Displaced Homemaker Program and I love it. I feel great mentally and physically. Even my back and leg pains are disappearing. I'm learning so many good things each day that I have no time to be depressed or unhappy.

The counselors have to be great and special people to be able to get into people's hearts like they have. Questions are answered and help given with problems in such a warm and understanding way that I now feel worthwhile and important. I have self respect and understand myself and others better.

Everything imaginable is covered in my classes. Such a variety of subjects! I was starving for knowledge and that need has and is being filled. I am greedy; the more I learn the more I want to know. The assertiveness training, Transactional Analysis, human relations, consumer problems, personal appearance, educational advancement, are things I'm learning about. There are job discussions and detailed job information. I found help in selecting a job I'd not only be suited for but I would be happy doing and doing well. For the first time in my life I have actually had a choice. I chose what I wanted to do and I am being trained to do it. It feels great.

I want to help other women to wake up, start living and feel the way I am feeling now. It's sad because there are a lot more like me who want to live different lives, but don't know how to go about it. Knowing I can go out in the working world and do a good job, becoming a taxpayer again instead of a dependent, is a good feeling. I would feel a whole lot better if I knew my tax money was put toward helping others, the main one being the Displaced Homemakers Program.

So, Gals, hang in there and keep this program going. It's needed and special. Everyone who is helped is going to help

others in some way throughout life but Displaced Homemakers is needed to reach these people first.

If you don't understand yourself, you can't understand others; if you don't love yourself, you can't love others; if you don't feel like a woman, you can't function like one. Displaced Homemakers can take care of all these things and make a winner out of the most dedicated loser.

The person who wrote that letter is a fine woman. She entered the program with more disadvantages than most. She had raised a large family, but continued to have ongoing responsibilities for her grown children and young grandchildren. Her participation in the program sparked an inner source of energy and determination. She entered the program in 1977 with an elementary school education; today, she has completed high school, and has received two associate degrees in accounting and business management. This Displaced Homemaker made it: She is now employed in the fiscal operation of a major employment program!

A follow-up evaluation of the Fort Wayne program provided little significant information. The recommendations contained in the full program evaluation are as follows:

1. Continuous counseling (which was an integral part of the program) should be conducted in a manner that does not create excessive dependence on the staff.
2. Community agency speakers should be used.
3. All sessions should last the same amount of time.
4. Field trips to various social/community facilities are extremely beneficial and should be increased.

Summary

Women who fall into the category of Displaced Homemaker may be in unfortunate circumstances now, but the determination and courage they display leave one with the conviction that displaced homemakers are some of society's finest people. No challenge is too great, no obstacle too large, to deter the really determined displaced homemaker from fulfilling her best intentions.

The general public attach a stigma to the displaced homemaker--they do not understand her and have little empathy for her situation. Unfortunately, few people really seem to understand unless they have had a similar experience. A film entitled "Who Remembers Mama?" by Cynthia Salzman Mondell and Allen Mondell depicts the plight of the displaced homemaker and her striving for survival. An excellent film, it has done much to acquaint the general public with this new phenomenon in our society.

The Fort Wayne program bolstered the self-respect of the women, provided them with pre-employment training, brought awareness to the community, and offered most rewarding learning experiences for staff members. Community perceptions of the Fort Wayne program were very positive. The program was allowed to exist without undue criticism, and it was highly successful as a public relations tool for the local CETA office, which had heretofore possessed a poor local image.

The Fort Wayne Area Consortium, and the areas served by its displaced homemaker program, are certainly far better for having had the opportunity to lend assistance to the great ladies who participated in the program.

"I now feel worthwhile and important. I have self respect and understand myself and others better."

Participant in the Fort Wayne
Displaced Homemakers Program

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